



## Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Volunteer Position Description

**Title:** Midewin RiverWatch Monitor

**RiverWatch Background:** RiverWatch is the only state-wide biological monitoring program in Illinois that educates and trains volunteers to collect high quality data on streams. The program was initiated in 1995 as part of the Critical Trends Assessment Project (CTAP), an Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) project designed to conduct a long-term, comprehensive assessment of the environment in Illinois. In February of 2006, responsibility for RiverWatch was officially transferred to the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRREC).

**Purpose:** RiverWatch certified volunteers collect high quality scientific data that will subsequently be used by professionals and the general public to gauge long-term trends in stream health, develop land management strategies, identify potentially degraded waters and assess the effectiveness of restoration projects. RiverWatch monitors help directly with part one of Midewin's mission to conserve, restore, and enhance the native populations and habitats of fish, wildlife, and plants.

**Duties and Responsibilities:** Monitors are responsible for their own transportation. This program requires a partner or team to perform monitoring activities, so monitors may choose their own or join an existing one. A designated stream site (200-foot stretch) on Midewin will be assigned and monitors will be asked to survey the site once a year (May 1- June 30). Midewin will provide the RiverWatch sampling kit which must be returned after the survey. Sampling involves conducting a stream habitat survey and collecting and preserving (in alcohol) aquatic organisms that reside in the stream. RiverWatch monitors may use Midewin's lab to identify the organisms collected. Volunteer hours must be entered online in Volgistics *after the survey within 48 hours*. Data sheets must be submitted to Midewin's Hydrologist after the macroinvertebrate identification is complete.

**Department and Location:** Under the direction of Midewin's Hydrologist, volunteer time and data is contributed to Midewin's Restoration Team. Assigned stream sites may be anywhere along the Grant, Prairie, Jackson or Jordan Creek within Midewin's property of 19,000 acres.

**Qualifications:** Monitors must be able to do field work, which includes carrying equipment, hiking distances of 200 feet to a mile to access their monitoring site, wading in ankle to knee-deep stream water, and standing for an extended period of time. Monitors should be interested in learning about stream ecosystems and learning to identify stream organisms.

**Time Commitment:** Monitors gain more experience every year and therefore data gets more thorough and accurate, so a multiple year commitment is preferred. Monitoring must be conducted during the same week each year, weather permitting. Monitors seem to spend 6-8 hours for the stream survey and an additional 6-8 hours in the lab for identification, depending on experience.

**Training:** In order to become a lead monitor for a team, volunteers must complete the RiverWatch training workshop for a registration fee of \$40, which Midewin may consider paying if you commit to a Midewin site. This workshop will cover safety, protocols and available training materials. Multiple training workshops are scheduled at various locations March-May. Refresher workshops are required every other year after the initial training (volunteers are responsible for a \$5 fee). Please call for the workshop schedules or check the website below. New monitors will be partnered with an experienced monitor for the first season or until they have completed the RiverWatch workshop. New monitors need to keep in mind they will be coordinating schedules with their experienced partner(s). Additional responsibilities could become applicable or available to this position in the future that might require additional training and/or certification. These additional responsibilities will be determined by the program managers and offered to selected volunteers. Please visit the Illinois RiverWatch Network website at <http://www.ngrrec.org/Riverwatch/>.

**Working Conditions/Physical Effort:** *Monitors are covered by the Volunteer Agreement (Form 301a) while performing duties described by this position description during the season(s) listed or scheduled shifts.* Monitors must read, sign and consent to the U.S. Forest Service Job Hazard Analysis, which includes emergency plans, safety requirements and recommended best practices. Monitors may work in variable conditions including:

- Exposure to outdoor weather conditions & allergens
- Walking on uneven terrain and/or through tall vegetation
- Hiking distances of 200 feet to a mile to access the site and wading in ankle to knee-deep stream water
- Standing for an extended period of time
- May be working near hazardous plants or insects
- Light to moderate lifting

**Related Opportunities:** Water Quality Monitors collect additional water quality data such as stream velocity measurements, water height measurements, measuring in-stream water quality parameters including temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen and turbidity. Additional parameters may include conductivity, nitrate and phosphorus. This type of long term monitoring is desired twice a month, so stream teams typically alternate in order to each monitor once a month.

**Benefits:** Volunteer monitors further the citizen scientist movement by contributing valuable stream data for wetland restoration. Monitors can observe long-term progress towards the ecological restoration of Midewin. Midewin's volunteer staff receives ongoing recognition from their supervisor and other staff. Volunteers that contribute three or more individual volunteer visits in the fiscal year will receive an invitation to an annual volunteer recognition banquet in November. Midewin's volunteer staff receives the bimonthly Prairie Telegraph. Volunteers may be featured in the telegraph, newspaper articles and/or US Forest Service success stories. Awards can be received for outstanding, innovative and/or long term, core volunteers.

*Midewin's volunteer program is coordinated through a partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy.*